



## Global Competence and Sustainability in the Apparel and Textile curriculum

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The apparel and textile industry is a three trillion dollar industry with complex, interdependent global supply chains. Students planning careers in the apparel and textile field need to achieve global competence and be familiar with sustainability if they are to manage the many issues of energy, water, pesticides, working conditions in manufacturing facilities around the world, and fast fashion consumption. The most recent data from the U.S. Census (2012) reveal that the Asian population in the U.S. is expected to increase from 3% to 11%, the African American population from 13% to 14 %, and the Latino population from 15% to 31% by 2060. In response to the changing global climate and the growing ethnic and cultural diversity in the U.S., there is a widely recognized need to add a global and cultural competency dimension to our educational programs. In addition to global learning, sustainability focused education has increased in importance since the UN's declaration of education for sustainable development (Connell & Kozar, 2012). However, despite the need for such educational opportunities, few studies have examined the current curriculum to determine if these two critical issues have been addressed. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the current apparel and textile curriculum in the U.S. higher education system and to explore the extent to which each course in the apparel and textile field has implemented global competence and sustainability in its course objectives.

Content analysis was conducted for this study. Three universities that had a full set of syllabi online were selected from those institutions offering four-year undergraduate programs in apparel design and apparel merchandising. Two additional sets of syllabi were collected from the researchers' own institutions. The objectives of each course were reviewed to evaluate if global competence and sustainability related learning topics were included. The Global Learning VALUE Rubric (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2014) was used to examine global learning competence. Key words from each course's objectives were selected to match six global learning values and criteria (*Global Self-Awareness, Perspective Taking, Cultural Diversity, Personal and Social Responsibility, Understanding Global Systems, and Applying Knowledge to Contemporary Global Contexts*). Researchers developed a rubric to assess sustainability learning by combining and modifying the Sustainability in Higher Education Assessment Rubric and the Sustainability Course Assessment questionnaire (The Pennsylvania State University, 2013). Eight sustainability learning values and criteria (*Knowledge and Awareness of Contemporary Issues and Different Perspectives, Action Skill Development, Environment Responsibility, Lifelong Learning, Application in Multiple Settings, Diverse Interactions, External Setting/Partner, and Sustainability Competence*) were used to identify key words from each course's objectives.

Of the 169 undergraduate course syllabi analyzed from the five different universities, 50 were designed for the merchandising major (M), 56 for the design major (D), and 63 for both majors. Our findings indicated that 48 courses (28.4%) addressed global competence and only eight courses (4.7%) covered sustainability. For global competence, 11 of the 48 courses were for merchandising majors, 9 were for design majors, and 28 were for both. When each individual global learning value was examined, all the criteria were addressed by courses for merchandising and for both majors, while design courses included all but *Global Self-Awareness*. The majority of the courses addressed *Cultural Diversity* (M:8, D:5, both:15), *Understanding Global Systems* (M:6, D:2, both:17), and *Perspective Taking* (M:4, D:4, both:14). Most courses that included global competence were offered at the junior (41.7 %) and the senior (33.3%) level. Among the eight courses that included sustainability in their course objectives, three were for the design major and five were for both majors. When sustainability learning criteria was evaluated, the three design courses addressed *Environment Responsibility*, *Lifelong Learning*, and *External Setting/Partner*, and the five courses for both majors addressed all eight sustainability learning criteria. *Knowledge and Awareness of Contemporary Issues and Different Perspectives* was the criterion that most courses covered (both: 4). Remarkably, none of the freshmen courses addressed sustainability, while about 63% of the courses for juniors did, 25% for sophomores, and only 12% for seniors. In the current curriculum, the majority of the courses that tackled global competence and sustainability were offered for both majors, but overall global competence was addressed to a greater degree than sustainability.

The findings of this study suggest that future Apparel, Merchandising, and Design programs should include global and sustainability related courses throughout the full four-year curriculum. These topics are essential for success in today's global and environmentally sensitive context and should be considered integral to every aspect of the programs. Although this study was limited by its small sample size and use of a convenient sampling method, it provides insights for academia and professionals to prepare future professionals for the important role of global competence and sustainability learning in the increasingly diverse apparel and textile industry.

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